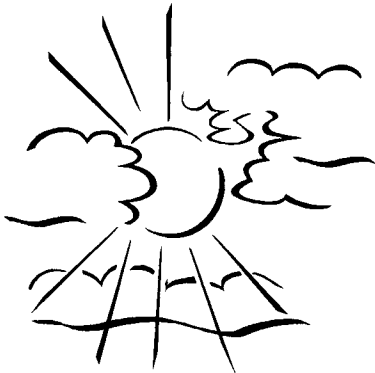


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

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January 23, 2006

GRANHOLM TO PROMOTE HEALTH INSURANCE PROPOSAL

The economy will be a primary focus of Governor Jennifer Granholm's State of the State address on Wednesday, but administration officials are keeping a tight hand on details of what she will propose on that subject. They were talking Monday, however, about a proposal to provide potentially 500,000 adults in Michigan with health insurance.

The proposal would be paid for with some of the money the state has saved the federal government over the years with greater efficiencies in Medicaid, and it will work with private insurance companies to help offer coverage to working individuals who do not now have health insurance.

The proposal was one of two major developments in the address, along with her proposal on the Merit scholarship that was leaked in advance.

While Michigan has one of the highest number of adults with health insurance through their employers, there are still about 1 million adults who do not have health coverage in the state.

The state cannot afford to cover all those persons, but if the proposal – which would likely take some months to win both legislative and federal approval – goes into place, then perhaps as many as half that number could get coverage.

Liz Boyd, spokesperson for Ms. Granholm, said that a wellness portion, calling on those insured to engage in health behaviors, would be a part of the package.

And those covered under the plan would be expected to contribute to the cost of the policies, Ms. Boyd said, unless they fell under the federal poverty income limits.

"The governor believes there is value in sharing the responsibility for health care," Ms. Boyd said.

She emphasized that the proposal would not provide Medicaid coverage for those adults. It would be health insurance using private companies for families with incomes up to \$38,700.

The state has saved the federal government some \$2 billion over the last decade in operating Medicaid more efficiently, Ms. Boyd said, and the state is asking the federal government to reinvest some of that savings with Michigan for the program.

Ms. Granholm has already spoken with U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt, the former governor of Utah, about the proposal and he has been positive so far.

Ms. Granholm's fourth State of the State address will deal with ensuring that the state continue to enjoy the middle-class lifestyle it has enjoyed for decades. Part of that is certainly ensuring that people have work and that they have good education, she said.

And access to health care is also part of that equation.

Sen. Tom George (R-Portage) who has made encouraging wellness one of his main legislative goals (see related story) said he understood the goal behind Ms. Granholm's proposal, but that she should put greater focus on wellness efforts.

healthcare incentives

Monday, January 23, 2006

By Chris Meehan

cmeehan@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8412

Republican State Rep. Tom George on Sunday hailed the announcement by Gov. Jennifer Granholm that she will propose in her State of the State address this week a \$1 billion plan to cut in half the number of state residents without health insurance.

But the Kalamazoo-area legislator says the governor is not going far enough in the program she calls "Michigan Health First Partnership."

George was to unveil in a press conference this morning his own plan to cut the cost of health care in Michigan.

"It is very interesting that she also identifies health care as such a key element of our state's economic problems," said George, who often encounters health-care-coverage issues in his work as an anesthesiologist. "We (Republicans) have drawn the same conclusion, but we have different approaches in fixing it," George said.

The governor proposes issuing state health-care cards to many of the 500,000 Michigan residents without health insurance.

Funding would come from the federal government as well as from money the state already pays through various programs, the Detroit News reported Sunday.

Granholm also proposes trying to cut health-care costs by teaching people how to make better lifestyle choices. The education would be provided through schools, churches and offices.

Making sure everyone has health coverage is a worthy goal, but it misses the mark, George said. Similarly, health education is fine, but current efforts to cut down on smoking and overeating and to boost people's level and frequency of exercise aren't effective.

"Just giving people health insurance doesn't make people healthier," George said. "You need pocket-book incentives to make this work."

Part of the legislation he was to announce would change state law to allow insurance companies to offer different rates depending on people's lifestyle choices.

Instead of limiting health insurers to policies that treat groups of people equally, it would allow the companies to tailor plans to businesses that can show their employees are living healthier.

"All insurance companies can do now is consider age and occupation and where a person lives," he said.

George also is proposing to include similar incentives in how state Medicaid money is distributed. Doing so would require a federal waiver, and George is asking the governor to apply for one.

In his proposals, George would open the door for insurers and Medicaid to offer lower co-pays, more coverage or even some kinds of gifts to those who can prove they have quit smoking or take the proper medication for such conditions as high blood pressure or diabetes.

George said Colorado, where rates of smoking and obesity and lack of exercise are lower than in Michigan, pays about a third less per Medicaid patient compared to Michigan.

When the disease rate is high, costs to treat the patients also are high, he said.

"These higher costs have huge effects on business, schools and the state," he said.

George introduced pieces of this package last year, but the state Senate has yet to act on it.

January 23, 2006

GEORGE OUTLINES NEXT PHASE OF HEALTH PROPOSALS

Saying the state needs to provide incentives to encourage more people to engage in healthy behaviors, Sen. Tom George (R-Portage) announced on Monday his third proposal to encourage healthy lifestyles, including codifying health lifestyle requirements for Medicaid recipients, promoting insurance discounts for companies with wellness programs and encouraging wellness programs.

Included in his proposal is a requirement that elementary schools in the state require students to engage in physical education activities at least twice a week.

While the state's economy is the main issue facing policymakers, Mr. George said, the high cost of treating the state's health adds to its economic problems. If Michigan were a healthier state where the cost of health care was cheaper, it would attract companies, he said.

Last year, Mr. George proposed that Medicaid recipients be required to pay co-pays on different types of care on a sliding scale if they did not engage in healthy behavior, and then proposed insurance companies be able to offer lower cost premiums for companies that have wellness programs in place.

While the administration agreed to co-pays in the 2005-06 budget, the specific Medicaid proposal was not adopted. And Mr. George said he expects committee hearings to be held soon on his health insurance proposal.

At a press conference Monday, Mr. George outlined his third component of his proposals to encourage more people in the state to engage in healthy behaviors.

Some of the legislation combines elements of his earlier proposals. For example, three bills in his eight-bill package will codify his proposals on Medicaid recipients engaging in wellness programs and require the state to seek a waiver from the federal government to allow for the program. Medicaid recipients are particularly prone to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking (44 percent of Medicaid recipients smoke compared to more than 20 percent of the total state population), and cutting some of those behaviors could save the state millions.

His proposal also calls for insurance companies being allowed to factor individual use of tobacco products in setting a company's premiums. Mr. George also called for the state

to create contracting preferences with companies that had wellness plans for their workers.

Mr. George also called for development of wellness plans for state workers (Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) said last week in an interview with Gongwer News Service that he was planning to create a wellness plan for Senate members and workers)).

And Mr. George also called for creation of a Michigan Outdoor Fitness Award.

While Michigan has one of the highest rates of individuals covered by health insurance, and while it has boosted expenditures on Medicaid by more than 40 percent over the last years, the state still suffers from unhealthy behaviors.

For example, he said, Colorado residents have a much lower percentage of individuals covered by health insurance, yet that state's rate of death from cardiovascular disease is one-third that of Michigan's. Mr. George said Michigan residents smoke 15 percent more than Colorado residents do and Coloradans exercise 15 percent more than Michiganders do.

GOP senator renews call to tie insurance to healthy behavior

1/23/2006, 5:07 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Senate Republicans are renewing efforts to reward people for exercising and not smoking, a move they say will drive down health care costs. Legislation unveiled Monday by state Sen. Tom George would charge Medicaid patients less for services if they exercise regularly and don't smoke, and give state contracting preferences to businesses that have employee wellness programs.

Other bills would let health insurers provide better rates to small businesses that employ fewer smokers, require elementary schools to offer physical education for 30 minutes at least two days a week and establish a wellness program for state employees. Wellness programs typically offer health screenings, exercise training and nutrition advice to workers.

George, an anesthesiologist from Portage, said unhealthy behaviors are known to contribute to at least 25 percent of health care costs.

"We can't control aging of our population," he told reporters. "New medical technologies that we rely on are generally beneficial. But we can control our own behavior."

The Medicaid proposal isn't new. It stalled in budget negotiations last year, so Republicans will try to address the issue outside the budget process, George said.

The senator also proposed bills last fall that would require insurance companies and health maintenance organizations to reward people for healthy behavior, though companies wouldn't have to buy the insurance coverage. Hearings will be held on those bills in the spring, George said.

George said high health care costs contribute to the state's economic troubles.

"Our businesses, schools and local and state governments cannot keep up with the rising cost of health care," he said. "We need comprehensive state policy changes that will encourage healthy behavior."

Senate Democrats pointed out that one bill is similar to legislation they introduced a year ago.

Sen. Deborah Cherry, D-Burton, is sponsoring a bill that would require elementary pupils to take part in 30 minutes of physical activity a day or 135 minutes a week.

Members of Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm's administration have said she is open to the idea of giving Medicaid recipients incentives to live healthier, but they have questioned the logistics.

Stabenow, Levin voice concerns about prescription drug program

1/23/2006, 5:41 p.m. ET

By KEN THOMAS
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michigan's two U.S. senators said Monday that a new Medicare drug benefit has led to mass confusion and urged lawmakers to quickly approve measures to help those ensnared in the system.

Sens. Debbie Stabenow and Carl Levin, both Democrats, said they were concerned after hearing complaints from patients and pharmacists that the new program was more costly, confusing and not covering the people it should.

"We now have, basically, a mess on our hands," Stabenow said in a conference call with reporters.

"This is a situation where you've got a large number of people who are going to be hurt by a program that's supposed to help them," Levin said in a phone interview from Detroit, where he met with pharmacists and elderly residents grappling with the new system.

Stabenow said her offices have been "bombarded" with phone calls about the program. A man from Wayne, Mich., told Stabenow's office his 76-year-old mother had to pay \$156 for a prescription because of a paperwork foul-up, even though she had a \$5 copay for the drug.

Under the new drug program that started Jan. 1, about 42 million senior citizens and disabled across the nation can enroll in private plans run by insurers and pharmaceutical benefit companies. The government subsidizes the drug coverage, with additional subsidies provided for the poor.

Democrats have said many elderly are having trouble getting their medications and pharmacists have had been left on the phone for hours trying to locate the files of patients that have switched plans.

Senate Democrats are sponsoring legislation in the Senate to require drug plans to provide new enrollees with at least 30 days of drugs, which is what the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has told the plans to do.

They also want states, pharmacies and beneficiaries to be reimbursed by the federal government for out-of-pocket costs because of problems with the new benefit and a reduction in the wait times for calls to Medicare's toll-free number, 1-800-Medicare.

Clinton Criticizes Implementation of Bush's Drug Plan for the Elderly

By RAYMOND HERNANDEZ
The New York Times

Published: January 24, 2006

ROCHESTER, Jan. 23 - Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton barnstormed through several upstate cities on Monday, unleashing a sharp attack on what she said was the Bush administration's failure to fix the problems plaguing a new federal drug benefit administered under Medicare. Her criticisms, made on a swing through Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo, seemed to reflect a growing sense among Democrats that the troubles with the new drug program are becoming a liability for Republicans as they seek to maintain control of both houses of Congress in the November elections.

In waging her attacks, Mrs. Clinton appeared at two pharmacies, a health care clinic and a hospital, arguing that low-income elderly people were paying hundreds of dollars for the same prescription drugs they paid little or nothing for before the new program started.

"Senior citizens were promised prescription drug coverage; they are now on their own," she said, speaking to a group of hospital administrators, doctors and other medical experts attending a health care forum here at Strong Hospital Medical Center.

Mrs. Clinton used a question about a controversial comment she made last week - likening the Republican-led Congress to a plantation in which dissent is not tolerated - to further her critique of the Medicare drug program and its Republican authors.

When a reporter asked her why she had made that remark, the senator explained that she was "deeply concerned" about the "heavy-handed way" in which Republican leaders ran the Congress.

"The result is that you get bills like this," she continued, noting that one Republican architect of the new program had wound up leaving Congress to work for the drug industry. "The real corruption is that the legislation being passed is not helping people."

Told of Mrs. Clinton's overall criticisms, a White House spokesman lashed out at her, contending that her husband's administration had not produced any significant legislation to help the elderly deal with the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs.

"The Bush administration and the Republican Congress delivered," Trent Duffy, the spokesman, said.

Mr. Duffy went on to suggest that Mrs. Clinton was free to "go back to the bad old days when people had to choose between food or drugs."

While acknowledging problems in carrying out the program, Mr. Duffy said they were to be expected given that the program represented the biggest change to Medicare in 40 years. He said the administration was moving to address those problems.

Mrs. Clinton's trip comes as state officials around the country have confronted widespread confusion and concern among Medicaid recipients since the program was introduced on Jan. 1. Much of that stems from the fact that many low-income people on Medicare have either been overcharged for prescription drugs at pharmacies or been denied their drugs altogether.

Several governors - Republicans and Democrats alike - have recently announced plans to spend state money to pick up the tab for these drugs temporarily while the federal government straightens out the problems with the new program.

While Mrs. Clinton supports federal efforts to help the elderly pay for costly drugs, she has been an outspoken critic of the current program. She voted against it in 2003, arguing that it did more to help insurance and drug companies than to help the elderly. Her office has also put together a manual in English and Spanish to help constituents navigate the program's complexities.

Mrs. Clinton and her advisers are well aware of the irony involved in her attacking Republicans for devising what has turned out to be a complicated and controversial health care plan. In the early 1990's, her plan for a national health insurance program was ridiculed by Republicans as an example of big-government excess.

Speaking at the health care forum here, she referred to her failed health care initiative, saying, "As you know, I have done a little work on health care myself and I still have the scars to show for it."

Mrs. Clinton heard directly from people with their own horror stories. "It's been a nightmare for older adults who have been frustrated and do not know what to do," said Ann Marie Cook, the president of Lifespan of Greater Rochester, an advocacy group representing the elderly.

When adults lose control, babies die in metro Detroit

Frustration, ignorance tied to deaths

January 24, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Whether smothered by a pillow, battered by fists or bound and gagged with an ace bandage, babies have been killed at an alarming rate in metro Detroit over the past year, according to charges filed by area prosecutors.

"We've had enough," said Nancy Diehl, chief of the felony trial division of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and a longtime prosecutor of child abusers. "Last year, I think we were up to 11 or so baby deaths. Now, of course, we've had two just since the New Year."

Although the numbers in the northern suburbs are smaller, the two baby homicides in Oakland County are just as tragic as those in Wayne County. Macomb County had no homicides of children younger than 2 in over a year, although a 7-week-old baby in Utica was severely injured apparently by being shaken in May, police say.

A common factor in many of the killings was a parent or boyfriend of the child's mother losing patience with the baby's crying and hurting the child in an effort to make the wailing stop, according to authorities.

"In the end, if you really are losing your patience, you're better off to leave the baby for a moment or finding some help," Diehl said. "People don't have to feel that they're alone in that difficult situation."

Anger, depression

A Free Press review of several child abuse homicide charges over the past year appears to bear out Diehl's assertion that frustration and ignorance often lead to tragic consequences for children. Take the Oct. 10 shaking death of 2-month-old Nakita Faith Lemons in her parents' apartment in Wayne.

The baby's father, Milton Lee Lemons, now 32, told police that he was "very angry, depressed" when he shook Nakita violently to get her to stop crying. Wayne police detectives said he showed them how he shook the baby, demonstrating it to them with a stuffed animal at the police station.

The child's death was caused by brain swelling with bleeding behind the eyes. A small bone fracture on Nakita's right shoulder also showed that she had been shaken violently, according to a police report.

Police said Lemons told them he loved his daughter, but "she cries a lot." He also said that "he knew shaking an infant can be fatal" because he had seen it on television, according to the police report.

Lemons was charged with first-degree murder, but hearings are delayed while he is being psychologically evaluated.

On June 6, 9-month-old Simone Cavanaugh was allegedly smothered by her mother in their Pontiac home. Shontelle Cavanaugh, who was charged with open murder, was suffering from postpartum depression, according to her lawyer, but she was found competent to stand trial. Cavanaugh is expected to be arraigned in Oakland County Circuit Court today.

Two weeks ago, on Jan. 10, 8-month-old Eryck Mark-Eugene Fossett died after a battering in his paternal grandmother's apartment in Canton Township, said prosecutors, who charged Carlee Hines Jr., 23, the boyfriend of the baby's mother, Erica Rodwell, with first-degree murder. Prosecutors said Hines admitted that "he got mad and picked Eryck up from behind and squeezed him."

Eryck died from blunt force trauma to the upper left abdomen that tore his spleen and liver and broke nine ribs.

Hines allegedly told police that he lost his temper because the baby was crying while he was trying to play a video game so he punched the baby with both fists. Hines "stated that he was just so mad because he had to put his video game on pause because Eryck kept crying," the police report said.

Asphyxiation

One of the strangest -- and perhaps most cruel -- recent killing of a baby occurred on Jan. 8 when 4-month-old Sivad Davis died of asphyxiation.

Detroit police homicide detectives say Deric Davis, 19, told them that he was tired of listening to his son crying that day, so he bound the baby's ankles and hands with wristbands to keep him from moving and then wrapped elastic gauze bandage around his face with only his nose exposed while the infant lay in his bassinet in an overheated apartment bedroom at 1001 E. Jefferson Avenue.

Davis set a fan to blow onto the baby's face then left the room to hang out in the efficiency apartment's living room-kitchen area with the baby's mother, Tiffiney Bentley, for at least 90 minutes but as long as three hours, said homicide detective Lance Newman.

"Here's the weird part," Newman said. "You know how when you blow into a cat's face that it shakes its head because it can't breathe? Can you imagine having your hands and feet bound and your face wrapped with only your nose exposed and a fan blowing on it?"

Bentley told police that she heard her baby crying for "an hour or so" but did not check on him as she continued listening to music through earphones. Bentley was not charged.

Davis' lawyer said the young father didn't mean to kill his son.

"He's beside himself and raw with grief over this terrible tragedy," the attorney, David Gorosh, said. "He feels just terrible about this accident."

The Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, however, calls Sivad's death premeditated murder.

Anyone with sense would know that leaving a baby in a stifling hot bedroom, alone in his bassinet, trussed up with only his nose exposed to breathe with a fan blowing directly on his face would cause the child to suffocate, officials said.

Davis was the victim of child abuse when he was a 1-year-old, according to Wayne County Family Court records that also said Davis spent years living with relatives because his mother was mentally ill and mentally retarded.

Parenting skills

Diehl, the prosecutor, said that judging from the criminal cases that "typically, in our society, a lot of men really don't have the experience of caring for a child. These mothers think they can leave their babies with a boyfriend who seems to be a very nice person, but they don't know how to deal with babies that are crying and needing attention.

"Do they teach good parenting in school?" Diehl asked. "If they are, clearly they're not teaching it enough."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Signs of abuse

- Physical Abuse

Physical indicators

- Bite marks, missing clumps of hair
- Unexplained bruises, welts, loop marks, burns, fractures or other wounds

Behavioral indicators

- Self-destructive/self-mutilation
- Withdrawn, aggressive
- Uncomfortable with physical contact
- Late to school, stays late after school as if afraid
- Chronic runaway
- Complaints of soreness, moves uncomfortably

Physical Neglect

Physical indicators

- Unattended medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene
- Distended stomach, emaciated

Behavioral indicators

- Regularly displays fatigue, falls asleep in class
- Steals or hoards food, begs from classmates
- Frequently absent or tardy
- Reports no caretaker at home

Sexual Abuse

Physical indicators

- Pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in genital area
- Venereal disease
- Frequent urinary or yeast infection
- Massive weight change

Behavioral Indicators

- Withdrawn, depressed
- Sexual behaviors, unusual sexual references
- Seductive or promiscuous behavior
- Poor self-esteem, lack of confidence
- Hysteria, lack of emotional control
- Suicide attempts
- Habit disorders such as sucking or rocking

Source: Child's Hope, the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Out-Wayne County
Jack Kresnak

Recent baby deaths in metro Detroit

- **Jan. 10:** Eryck Mark-Eugene Fossett, 8 months old, is found dead in his grandmother's apartment in Canton Township. His mother's boyfriend, Carlee Hines Jr., 23, is charged

with felony murder after allegedly admitting to police that he had punched the infant. A preliminary examination for Hines is set for Friday in 35th District Court in Plymouth.

- **Jan. 8:** Sivad Davis, 4 months old, is taken to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit after he stopped breathing. His father, Deric Davis, 19, is charged with first-degree murder; police say he admitted that he bound the baby's hands and feet and wrapped an Ace bandage around his head, cutting off his air supply.
•2005
- **Dec. 17:** The body of 9-month-old Malik O'Neal is found hidden in a cabinet in the basement of his grandmother's home in Detroit. Authorities say the boy's mother, Jessica Marie O'Neal, 21, later confessed to suffocating her son with a pillow and then hiding the body for more than a week. The case is pending because of a court-ordered psychological examination of O'Neal.
- **Oct. 10:** Nakita Faith Lemons, 2 1/2 months old, dies after being shaken in her parents' apartment in Wayne, authorities say. Her father, Milton Lee Lemons, 32, is charged with first-degree murder. The case is pending because of a court-ordered psychological examination of Lemons.
- **Sept. 16:** Vershawn White, 10 months old, dies after suffering blunt force trauma to the head and stomach. Police say the baby's mother's boyfriend, Gary Love Jr., 19, admitted striking the child to get him to stop crying and is charged with felony murder. A trial is scheduled to begin Monday.
- **June 6:** Simone Cavanaugh, 9 months, is allegedly smothered in her Pontiac home. Her mother, Shontelle Cavanaugh, is charged with open murder. Her lawyer says she was suffering from postpartum depression, but a psychological examination found her competent to stand trial. Cavanaugh, who was bound over for trial Jan. 12 on a charge of second-degree murder, is scheduled to be arraigned today in Oakland County Circuit Court.
- **May 19:** Tamyah Vaughn, 18 months, and her half-brother, Raylond McCulley, 10, are killed in a firebombing of their mother's home in Detroit. The mother's boyfriend, Kenneth Fitzgerald Nixon, 19, and 18-year-old Latoya Caulford, both of Detroit, are charged with felony murder. Their trial is pending.
- **April 16:** Odessa Solomon, 5 months, is suffocated in her crib by her mother's boyfriend, John Henry Whitfield, 40. Whitfield is convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 7-15 years in prison.
- **March 2:** Tyler Michael Bates, 6 months, is shaken and beaten to death, allegedly by his father, Ryan Kierzak, 21, in their Canton Township home. Kierzak allegedly became upset with the baby's crying and repeatedly shook the baby saying, "Shut the (expletive) up or I'll shut you up," according to a police report. He is charged with felony murder. His trial is pending.

Sources: Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, area police departments

Jack Kresnak

Reporting suspected child abuse, neglect

Call your local county Department of Human Services. These numbers are answered 24 hours a day.

Wayne: 313-963-6006

Oakland: 248-975-5010

Macomb: 586-412-6109

Monroe: 734-243-7400

Genesee: 810-760-2222

Washtenaw: 734-481-9110

Livingston: 517-546-8668

Toddler's Injuries Lead To Mom's Arrest

3-Year-Old Expected To Recover

POSTED: 3:28 pm EST January 23, 2006

The assault of a 3-year-old boy has led to the arrest of the child's mother and the mother's boyfriend in Highland Park.

Police arrested the couple after receiving a tip phone call about the abuse, Local 4 learned. The child was transported to Children's Hospital, where doctors determined there was evidence of abuse, according to police.

The 3-year-old was listed in stable condition with head injuries, but is expected to recover, according to Local 4.

The couple remains in custody while police continue their investigation. No charges have been filed. The Wayne County Sheriff's Department will present their evidence to the prosecutor's office for possible charges.

The family's name was not released.

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Child Shot After Boy Brings Gun To Day Care

POSTED: 9:23 am EST January 24, 2006

UPDATED: 9:32 am EST January 24, 2006

GERMANTOWN, Md. -- Police in a Washington, D.C., suburb say a 7-year-old girl was shot at a day-care center when a gun that was brought in by another child accidentally went off. Police said an 8-year-old boy who also goes to the For Kids We Care day-care center in Germantown, Md., had the gun in a backpack. The boy was playing with the gun in the backpack when it accidentally went off. Police said he did not take the gun out of the backpack. The girl was struck in the arm. She was taken to Children's Hospital in Washington. Her injury is not considered life-threatening.

There were six children in the center at the time of the shooting, which occurred just about before 7 a.m. Tuesday. No one else was hurt.

Police said they do not know where the child got the gun.

Police have not released the child's condition and the said the shooting remains under investigation.

Distributed by Internet Broadcasting Systems, Inc. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

State should pay for school fingerprinting Finesse is required in dealing with workers' criminal records

Two things need to happen in implementing the state's new Student Safety Initiative. School districts need to be intelligent in how they treat employees with criminal records, and the state should pay for the fingerprinting of the employees.

A Detroit News inquiry has revealed that 2,200 employees of school districts have been convicted of felonies -- serious crimes that normally call for prison sentences. And more than 100 of these convictions were for sex crimes.

While the Student Safety Initiative, a law that became effective this month, requires that those convicted of sex crimes should be immediately dropped from school payrolls, that doesn't mean that all of the other employees should be as well. Of course, those who are convicted of sex crimes should be dismissed.

However, the law properly gives school boards and superintendents discretion about other people convicted of felonies. School districts should use that discretion appropriately.

Someone as intelligent and creative as Birmingham Seaholm High School graduate Tim Allen, a well-known comedian, would be ineligible to serve as a janitor in a Michigan school if the new law is enforced ham-handedly. Allen served a brief prison sentence for a drug offense nearly 30 years ago.

The law requires background checks on all school employees, including custodians, clerical and food service employees as well as professional and administrative staffers.

Currently, those background checks are conducted by comparing lists of school employees with records of criminal convictions maintained by the State Police.

Between now and 2008, all school employees will have to have completed fingerprint checks.

But the state did not supply any funding for the fingerprinting, which could cost several million dollars.

The attorney general has been asked to issue a ruling on who pays for the procedure. In our view, the state Constitution is pretty clear: If the state requires local governments to perform a service, the state has to provide the funding.

Background checks to provide information on school employees' criminal records so school districts can make appropriate decisions are a good idea. But if the state requires fingerprint checks, the state should pay for them.

Michigan Report

January 23, 2006

P.S.C. EXPANDS CHILD PROTECTION REGISTRY

The Public Service Commission announced Monday it had opened the Protect MI Child registry to instant messenger IDs, mobile text messaging and fax numbers. These methods of contact would carry the same penalties as email addresses have since July for those sending inappropriate messages to children.

The Children's Protection Registry Act (PA 241, 2004) requires those sending unsolicited messages to check their contact lists with the state registry every 30 days and provides fines for those who send messages to email addresses and contact numbers on the list.

The registry applications as well as information on filing complaints are available at www.protectmichild.com

Children's center nears opening

By: Adam Bennett

Story updated January 23, 2006 11:35AM

Family Counseling and Shelter Service plans to open its satellite site next month and has enlisted the city's help to apply for a federal grant.

A children's counseling center might open near downtown Monroe as soon as Jan. 30, and group leaders say referrals for the relocated program already may start swelling.

Family Counseling and Shelter Services (FCSS) plans to open the satellite site by early February to house its monitored exchange program and other court-ordered counseling services. The facility will be located at 621 S. Monroe St.

The organization had been actively looking for a site to expand its program, which gives divorced or separated parents who share custody a safe, neutral place to exchange a child. The programs have grown out of a one-room area in FCSS' LaPlaisance Rd. headquarters since the group started monitored exchanges last year.

The independent house would give a single, central location to do the exchanges, counseling and other services, giving parents and children a more comforting place.

But Director Dr. David Stadler said the new site would offer more than the one program.

"The children's center goes beyond visitation," he said. "It also works for developing and mentoring the children, which in a divided family is difficult."

Case managers, therapists and other workers would be on site to assist families.

The finishing touches are being put on the facility to prepare for the opening. A program director — Kathleen Bruce — and other staff already have been hired, but toys and other decorations still need to be put in place.

"It's still a work in progress," Dr. Stadler said. "But we got plasterboard up where there was old paneling, it's painted and there's new carpet throughout. It's a lot more suitable to what we are doing."

He said an open house is planned next week for select county officials, including judges and case workers who would refer families to the program.

Though the opening has been delayed by the city's approval process and renovations, Dr. Stadler said the timing of the move is optimal.

"We're getting a lot of pressure to take on more cases," he said. "With the space we had, it was not possible."

The director said about 50 families have been through the program since it started. He expected the rolls to grow to 200 to 300 families.

"I think we'll start very quickly in taking on more cases," he said.

The group also has renewed a memorandum of understanding with the City of Monroe in seeking a federal Safe Havens grant totaling more than \$250,000. The agreement would name the city as administrator of the grant.

FCSS was passed up for the funding last year, though Dr. Stadler said the programs have gone through a number of changes since then.

With the monitored exchange program, he said, the group may be more likely to secure the funding.

Getting serious on child visits

Bitter parents who try to block their formerly beloved's access to the couple's child(ren) following divorce might think twice in New Hampshire, where a proposed bill aims to make life difficult for uncooperative custodial parents.

How difficult? By inviting the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to investigate the offending parent for child abuse and neglect.

This relatively revolutionary move was the brainchild of Maine psychiatrist Dr. Stevan Gressitt, who has been working with legislators to put some teeth into visitation enforcement. New Hampshire HHS Commissioner John Stephens endorsed the idea, and a bill sponsored by state Rep. David A. Bickford, a Republican, headed to committee earlier this month.

Gressitt is hoping for a domino effect if the bill passes in New Hampshire.

The idea behind such legislation is that children of divorce should continue to have access to both parents, assuming there's no reason to protect a child from one of his parents. While child visitation orders are taken seriously in theory, the legal process of enforcement is usually time-consuming, laborious and expensive. In practice, the failure to take them seriously leads to an ever-widening, and predictable, trajectory of distance between the child and visiting parent.

Bickford's bill (House Bill 1585) would make it easier for parents denied visitation to seek remedy, while promising grief for parents who don't cooperate.

First, the noncustodial parent would get an expedited court hearing rather than take a docket number and possibly wait three to four months. Next, if the judge determines that the custodial parent is blocking access for no legitimate reason, then the Department of Health and Human Services would be notified of a possible case of child abuse and neglect.

Gressitt contends that denying a child his parent out of vindictiveness is a form of child abuse, but Bickford, a nonclinician, says he isn't ready to go that far. He explained to me that the bill supposes some parents may block access to hide abuse and that, therefore, the case warrants investigation.

He did say, however, that should there be a finding of psychological or emotional harm -- a form of abuse -- then the custodial parent could be prosecuted, referred for needed treatment, or lose parental rights.

I feel your cringe. Who wants government bureaucrats breathing down parents' necks to see who got little Johnny for the weekend?

I'm happy to lead the chorus saying family matters are none of the state's concern -- let the adults hash out their visitation schedules. But abuses of this mannered approach assume qualities not always present in some adults and often leave non-custodial parents (usually fathers) bereft and angry.

Common sense tells us what we seem to need studies to demonstrate -- that children need two parents and manage divorce best when they have equal access to both.

While family courts are increasingly trying to ensure that children have that access by awarding joint or shared custody, emotionally distraught humans don't always follow directions.

Meanwhile, courts and the state historically have been more effective in enforcing child support than visitation such that we have entire bureaucracies built around support collection tied to federal incentives. For every dollar that states put up to collect child support monies, for example, the federal government matches with two dollars. Other incentive funds are also available to reward collections.

While fathers' organizations long have pushed for stronger visitation enforcement, there are also some 3 million non-custodial mothers in the U.S., according to David Levy, chief executive of the Children's Rights Council, a nonprofit group that advocates for shared custody. Levy applauded the New Hampshire bill, saying that the proposed bill codifies the idea that it's important for children of divorce to continue to have both parents. But the proposed bill is not without critics. As with any law related to personal relationships, this one could be tricky to enforce. Imagine a HHS social worker knocking on your door to ask why you didn't let Johnny see his daddy last weekend.

Such well-intentioned laws also could backfire. As one close observer put it in an e-mail exchange, "Getting (HHS) involved is usually the worst thing to do. They usually side with the 'Mom who is concerned about letting the kids go to their father' and, they (investigators) may decide that neither parent is fit. And take custody of the kid(s)."

Such is the mess we have made of our lives.

In the best and least of all worlds, the deterrent effect of such a scenario would make visitation abuses less common and enforcement unnecessary. That way, only the bad guys lose. Or gals, as the case may be.

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The Monroe Evening News

A tradition of community service since 1825

An employee-owned newspaper

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LONNIE PEPPLER-MOYER, president and publisher

DEBORAH SAUL, editor and vice president

The Monroe Evening News

letters to the editor

Letters are welcome

Letters on matters of public interest are welcome. Full name, address and telephone number are required. Anonymous letters and those without verifiable names and addresses will not be published. Letters are limited to 400 words and may be edited for brevity. The e-mail address is tom@monroenews.com. Fax: (734) 242-0937.

Child support misdirected?

I am trying to find out why parents of children in foster care don't have to pay child support to the Department of Human Services while their children are in foster care. I know that some parents are ordered to pay the courts a fee, for what I don't know, but I do know that the courts get the money, not the DHS.

Child support would help hire more social workers and help the state pay for the children. Every foster parent is paid for the child while in their care. Think about

the money the state could have to help out in other areas.

Why should these parents be able to collect money from the other parent when the children are gone? I know that the state stops the payments sooner or later, but the DHS could really use that money to help pay other things.

I need someone to help me find out these answers. No court should receive child care payments for children in foster care. Yes, the parents should pay the courts for the time they spend in court but not for the care of the children.

Bonnie Corbett
 Erie

Editor's note: Maureen Sorbet of the state Department of Human Services said a parent should not be receiving payment if a child has been removed from his or her custody. Generally the court will direct that payment go to the state, she said. When that doesn't happen, she said, foster parents should get in touch with the local social worker handling the case.

Old catalogs will give homes warm feeling

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

By Paul R. Kopenkoskey
The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- Hastings Manufacturing has donated oodles of catalogs that will help keep low-income families comfy in their homes.

The piston ring manufacturer gave away nearly 33,000 outdated product line catalogs to Nu-Wool Inc., which has agreed to recycle them into insulation and donate it to Habitat for Humanity of Kent County.

Jim VanderWerf, director of purchasing for Hastings Manufacturing, said the catalogs have been used since 2001. New ones were printed when Anderson Group of Bloomfield Hills purchased the 90-year-old manufacturer last December for \$9.1 million.

This is the first time Hastings Manufacturing donated its catalogs for recycling, VanderWerf said.

"We have all these catalogs here and Habitat for Humanity is a good cause of course," he said. "It looks like a match."

The idea to have them recycled instead of ending up in a landfill germinated when VanderWerf read a recent Press article about companies in Kent County donating their telephone books to Nu-Wool.

Habitat for Humanity of Kent County builds homes for people whose income falls between 25 to 50 percent of the area median income, adjusted for family size.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Thank Your Mentor Day” Wednesday; Part of Mentoring Month in Michigan

Governor, First Gentleman Encourage Residents to Mentor a Child

January 23, 2006

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced Michigan will celebrate “Thank Your Mentor Day” on Wednesday, January 25. Granholm and First Gentleman Daniel G. Mulhern continue to call on people around the state to step forward and mentor children in their community.

Granholm declared January Mentoring Month in Michigan to coincide with the observance of National Mentoring Month.

“Mentors are critical to building stronger futures for Michigan’s children and I am proud to recognize their service to our state,” Granholm said.

In addition to recognizing the work of mentors, “Thank Your Mentor Day” encourages those who have had a mentor to pass on the experience and become a mentor themselves.

“What better way to show your appreciation for your mentor than by continuing his or her work and stepping forward to mentor a child,” Mulhern said. “No special skills or credentials are required to be a mentor. A good mentor simply takes a bit of time on a regular basis to show interest and concern for a youngster.”

As attorney general, Granholm created the Mentor Michigan Initiative, now led by Mulhern. Mentor Michigan is a statewide effort to raise awareness about the need for mentors and the benefits associated with mentoring. As a result of the initiative, organizations across the state are coming together to encourage people to mentor a child.

Last week, Granholm signed an executive order establishing the Mentor Michigan Leadership Council to support and promote mentoring efforts in the state and educate citizens on the benefits gained for everyone involved in mentoring.

The First Gentleman and the Governor are encouraging mentors across the state to celebrate National Mentoring Month by recruiting citizens to be mentors.

Additionally, the Michigan Community Service Commission, chaired by Mulhern, has program information and resources on the Mentor Michigan website to help future mentors find an available mentoring organization in their community.

For more information, call 1-800-VOLUNTEER or visit www.mentormichigan.org

Mentor Michigan is managed by the Michigan Community Service Commission, a state agency that builds a culture of service by providing vision and resources to strengthen communities through volunteerism. Visit www.michigan.gov/mcsc or call (517) 335-4295 for more information.

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Four state universities announce minority mentoring program

1/24/2006, 4:11 a.m. ET

The Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Officials with four state universities announced a new mentoring program designed to give minority students studying science, math, technology and engineering more help toward earning bachelor's degrees.

Michigan State, Wayne State and Western Michigan universities and the University of Michigan are financing the 5-year, \$5 million Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation program along with a grant from the National Science Foundation.

The schools want to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in engineering and technical fields by 50 percent in 5 years and double the number in 10 years, the Detroit Free Press reported in Tuesday editions.

The program will create research opportunities, internships and residential learning programs for minorities in math and the sciences, according to university officials. The program will be based at the University of Michigan, with satellite offices at the other three campuses.

"America is not producing enough graduates right now to replace the scientists and engineers that will retire by the end of the decade," U-M President Mary Sue Coleman said while introducing the program Monday. "And the next generation of scientists and researchers must be as diverse as our nation."

Only 24 percent of Michigan residents have bachelor's degrees, compared with about 29 percent nationally, according to 2004 U.S. Census data. Blacks and Hispanics in the state have about a 15-percent graduation rate, compared with national rates of 17 percent for blacks and 12 percent for Hispanics.

Information from: Detroit Free Press, <http://www.freep.com>

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Teen back in court in mom's slaying First-degree murder charge is filed against student, 16, in April death in Rochester Hills.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

ROCHESTER HILLS -- The case of a Rochester Hills teenager charged in the April slaying of his mother is heading back to District Court for a preliminary examination.

Oakland Circuit Judge John McDonald on Monday remanded the case of Christopher Dankovich, 16, back to Rochester Hills 52-3 District Court after assistant prosecuting attorney Lisa Ortleib asked for a hearing on specific charges, including first-degree murder.

Dankovich has been held on an open murder charge in the April 24 death of his mother, Diane Michele. She was stabbed 111 times with a knife at her home.

"(Dankovich) was undercharged," said Ortleib, who will ask for a first-degree murder charge.

Ortleib said the court exam was initially waived with the consent of the Prosecutor's Office and Dankovich's attorneys. Dankovich has also been examined by a psychiatrist who determined he was mentally competent to stand trial and aid in his defense.

But his attorney, Mitchell Ribitwer, said Dankovich's mental state at the time of his mother's slaying is expected to be an issue at the exam and trial. "We had hoped to have this resolved before and to avoid a trial (with a lesser charge)," said Ribitwer. "Now we're leaning towards a criminal responsibility defense, like a not-guilty by reason of insanity."

Dankovich, who did not attend Monday's hearing, remains held in Oakland County Children's Village without bond.

Investigators said Dankovich's parents are divorced, and Christopher had lived with his mother for eight years. Michele, a 49-year-old licensed hypnotherapist and social worker, had argued with her son about items she found in his bedroom and pornographic and gun-making Web sites he had visited, authorities said.

The Rochester Adams freshman had made some of his own weapons out of PVC pipe his mother found under his bed, investigators said. .

After the murdered woman's body was discovered in her Palm Aire Drive home by her mother, police tracked the teenager to a family cabin in St. Helen, in Roscommon County. He was arrested there without incident.

She had been a counselor, speaker, a columnist and a trainer for attitudinal healing, which encourages people to take responsibility for inner peace and reject conflict.

"She was a light to this world, and we all miss her presence in our lives," said Dr. Laurie Pappas, a friend and co-director of the Metropolitan Detroit Center of Attitudinal Healing.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

Teens Accused Of Sexually Assaulting 13-Year-Old

Incident Allegedly Occurred In Barn Behind Victim's Home

POSTED: 11:46 am EST January 24, 2006

A 14-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl were arrested Monday in connection with the alleged sexual assault of a 13-year-old girl.

The 13-year-old victim said the 14-year-old boy and 15-year-old girl, with whom she was acquainted, came to her Augusta Township home at about 5 p.m. Monday, and the trio went to a barn behind her family's home, according the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department in a report by the *The Ann Arbor News*. There was an argument and the 13-year-old said the other girl hit her several times, and she was pinned to the ground, the paper reported.

The 13-year-old girl said the 15-year-old girl sexually assaulted her, according to the paper's report. The 14-year-old boy is also believed to have participated in the sexual assault, according to Sheriff's Commander Dave Egeler.

The girl was able to free herself and run home. She reported the incident to her mother and authorities were notified. The two suspects were later arrested, according to Egeler.

The teenagers face charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, the paper reported. They were being held at a juvenile detention facility, awaiting a detention hearing Tuesday afternoon. Egeler said the suspects attend Lincoln Consolidated Schools. No further information was released on the victim or suspects.

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Teen pregnancies need state's attention, officials say

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

CENTREVILLE -- Some in southwestern Michigan may have been surprised to learn that St. Joseph County has the highest teen-pregnancy rate in Michigan, but it isn't news to the county's Human Services Commission.

County officials hope the announcement -- made earlier this month after an annual state study by Kids Count in Michigan -- will garner state funding to combat the problem.

"Unfortunately, the issue doesn't get (the state's) attention until it becomes a calamity," said Elizabeth O'Dell, collaboration coordinator for the St. Joseph County Human Services Commission. "Time after time we have been turned down for (state) grants. That's something I hope will change in light of this No. 1 ranking."

The state study took a look at teen-related wellness issues, including the number of teens who are living in poverty, those eligible for subsidized school lunches and those who have been victims of abuse or neglect, as well as foster-care placements. The number of pregnancies of teens ages 15 to 19 also was studied.

St. Joseph County's teen-pregnancy rate was a state-high 56.5 per 1,000 teens, significantly higher than the state average of 35.8 per 1,000.

The study used statistics from the state's 2004-05 fiscal year, during which 127 babies were born to St. Joseph County teens.

The 25-member St. Joseph County Human Services Commission oversees programs and establishes policies relevant to teen wellness and other social issues.

A decrease in state funding has led to an increased reliance on other sources of income, including generous allocations from the county's various public-school districts, the Intermediate School District, local service clubs and individuals.

Other proposed programs and services, however, never got off the drawing board.

A grant to assemble an abstinence-awareness program was turned down. Plans for a teen health center were scrapped after the financial request was denied by the state. A visiting-nurses proposal never developed for the same reason; a program, Building Strong Youth/Healthy Families, was a state-budget victim, too.

O'Dell said the rural nature of St. Joseph County sometimes is a hinderance. The visiting-nurses program was turned down, for example, because of the number of miles the nurses would have to travel from one community to the next, she said.

"We've been asking our state counterparts for support when the money was available, but we would get turned down, and now we're saying to them, 'I tried to warn you,'" she said.

The various programs and counseling services offered by the 11-year-old agency focus on developing the self-esteem of teens considered at risk of becoming pregnant. O'Dell called the programs "future oriented" and said they focus on potential career opportunities for at-risk teenagers.

The commission's strongest tool, O'Dell said, is "Our Voices," a video the commission developed in 1998. The video features teen mothers who give an emotional account of how they thought they would not become pregnant at such a young age and the consequences of being a young mother. O'Dell said the "I never thought it would happen to me" message is a powerful supplement to the other programs she has helped develop.

Roger Rathburn, superintendent of Three Rivers Community Schools, said it is critical to ensure every teen has as much information as possible when it comes to sex and its potential consequences.

"The wrong thing to do is to turn our backs on the young women who do get pregnant," he said.

"The focus then turns to the well-being of the child and then improving the chances of that young mother graduating high school."

The Three Rivers district continued an offshoot of the county's Even Start program after the state discontinued providing federal funds for the program. The district now is picking up the \$35,000-a-year tab to continue it, Rathburn said.

St. Joseph County government provided more than \$33,000 to the county's Human Services Commission last year. The county's faith-based agencies, the local United Way and other service organizations also contribute to its funding, which has an annual budget of about \$200,000.

One bright spot O'Dell noted is that the county is seeing a steady decrease in repeat teen births, dropping to a 12-year low in 2002 with 19 per 1,000. She attributed the drop to the Even Start program.

Also, O'Dell recently set up a mentoring program that matched 300 youths with caring adults to serve as positive role models.

"It's not that we don't know there is a (teen pregnancy) problem," she said. "But our means to reach out to those teens at risk of becoming pregnant are so strapped right now."

Program a safety net for teen moms, their kids

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

THREE RIVERS -- A program that helps teen mothers stay in high school and earn their diplomas became a casualty of federal funding cutbacks last year. But Board of Education members in Three Rivers didn't hesitate to pick up the tab to continue Even Start.

"It was one of those programs that the board, really everyone involved with the program and our Huss Academy, believed in," said Roger Rathburn, Superintendent of Three Rivers Community Schools. "We felt it was critical to offer additional services to the young parents so they can finish high school."

Huss Academy, a six-teacher alternative high school, includes nearly 90 students, and about 15 are young mothers intent on earning their diplomas. Other than the Even Start class period that focuses on parenting skills, the teen parents take courses and examinations identical to their counterparts at the traditional high school.

Rathburn said the young moms (and one dad in this year's Even Start program) are treated with the same respect as other students.

"None of these students will deny they made a mistake, but our attitude is that we need to move forward and make the best possible situation we can for them and their sons and daughters," he said. "It's tough enough being a high school student without also being a parent."

On-site daycare is provided at the school, an important amenity that Rathburn said relieves students of the burden of finding costly outside daycare for their infants. Without that on-site care, he said, most of the young parents would not be able to continue their schooling.

The school board committed more than \$35,000 this school year to continue the Even Start program at the former Huss School. Had the once-vacated building not been available, Rathburn said, the opportunity for the Even Start program would have been limited.

Theresa Hambright, the school's child-care director, said Even Start has two goals: to give the young mothers a chance to finish high school and to get their children off to a good start in life.

"The children of our students are assessed regularly in five areas of development, so I can make any referrals that may be necessary," she said, adding that the St. Joseph County Intermediate School District makes its services available to any child of a Huss student.

Marycarmen Garcia is an 18-year-old junior. While attending her 50-minute parenting class on Monday, she bounced her 10-month-old son, David, on her knee as she contemplated where she would be if the Huss Academy didn't exist.

"I'd probably be at home, raising David," she said. "Having David here during the day allows me to focus on my school work, and I can concentrate better because I know he is in good hands very close by."

Garcia plans to enroll in cosmetology school, an option she said would not be possible without finishing high school.

Hilary Kuhnle, a senior, spends mornings at Huss and afternoons at a beauty school in Portage. Kuhnle said Even Start has allowed her the opportunity to finish her high school education and still be able to interact with her 18-month-old son during the day.

``Knowing he's not far from me while I'm in school, it just reduces a lot of stress," she said.

The Three Rivers Board of Education has not yet made a commitment to fund Even Start for the 2006-07 school year.

Man gets prison for brutal attack on girlfriend

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

By Theresa D. McClellan
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

Carlos Medina was handed between 12 and 72 years in prison for an attack on the mother of their five children, a crime the judge called "a new low."

Police say Medina, 34, raped, then stabbed Maria Torres a dozen times before burying her in the woods with debris and dirt because she tried to leave him.

"I must say that a bad part of my job is that I see cruel things done to others. The cruelty that you showed takes it to a new low," Newaygo County Circuit Judge Anthony Morton told Medina Monday.

Medina pleaded guilty to assault with intent to murder and he also pleaded no contest to third-degree criminal sexual conduct for the April 11 attack on his 25-year-old girlfriend.

As Torres stood at the courtroom podium waiting to make her victim-impact statement, Medina saw her as he entered the courtroom and started grinning. An interpreter stood next to him and repeated in Spanish the words she spoke to the judge of the pain she still suffers in her ribs and back.

"He left me to die," Torres said quietly to the judge.

She also told the judge, "I have five kids to raise by myself. I just want him out of my life," she said.

The attack began after Medina, a Cedar Springs resident, lured Torres to meet him with a promise of money for their children.

While headed to a nearby migrant camp in Grant Township, he requested sex "one last time."

Torres said she feared for her safety and thought doing so would save her from harm. He then stabbed her repeatedly with an ice pick in the neck and back. He stopped the attack when she played dead. He buried her with leaves and dirt in the woods. Torres later climbed from beneath the debris and crawled a quarter mile to the nearest home to call police.

She spent five days in the hospital. Medina fled to Florida, where he was captured in October on unrelated cocaine charges.

Morton told Medina his actions are "hard to understand. She is the mother and the primary caregiver of five of your kids," he said.

Medina declined to comment.

Man sentenced in fatal shooting

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Robynn Page did not provoke her former boyfriend to shoot her last May, a judge said Monday at the sentencing of the man charged with her slaying.

"She did nothing. She was there. She got shot. Now, her family can no longer enjoy her,"

Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Melinda Morris said before sentencing Fernando Roberson to 30 to 50 years in prison on a second-degree murder charge.

Roberson, 32, pleaded guilty in December to shooting Page, 25. Roberson told police that he snapped because another man was at her apartment in Ford Lake Landing in Ypsilanti Township on May 21.

Roberson was the father of two of Page's four children, who were between the ages of 2 and 11 when she died.

Morris also sentenced Roberson to six to 15 years in prison on a charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm and two years in prison on a charge of using a weapon to commit a felony.

Page's mother, Bertha Page, one of four family members who made a victim's impact statement during the sentencing, said the four children ask for their mother each day and her family misses her each day.

"You have taken away a precious life," Bertha Page told Roberson.

Robert Page, Robynn's father, told Roberson: "I will never forget what you've done, but I won't waste time hating you."

Roberson did not comment prior to being sentenced.

His attorney, Daniel Geherin, told the judge that Roberson cried throughout his interview with police when he confessed to shooting Page because, James Kearney, was in her apartment.

Kearney is the father of Page's two older children.

"Mr. Roberson said he snapped," Geherin told the judge.

According to court testimony and police reports, a few weeks before the shooting, Page had broken up with Roberson and had asked him to leave the apartment they had shared. Page had been inside her apartment with a few friends about 4 a.m. on May 21 when Roberson showed up. Page left her second-floor apartment and walked down the stairs to the entrance landing where Roberson shot her, police said.

Washtenaw County Assistant Prosecutor Anthony Kendrick said Monday that medical testimony showed Page was shot 10 times. Page was able to crawl back up the stairs to her apartment where she died.

Roberson was arrested later that day in Cincinnati.

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6810.

Bus rides

Many have reason to keep transportation to job sites

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

What better investment could government make in people of modest means than to help them stay working? However, bus trips taking more than 1,000 from Flint daily to employers a long commute away are threatened because of a near wipeout in special federal and state aid. Fortunately, Robert J. Foy, general manager of the Mass Transportation Authority, is committed to maintaining this essential service, but he could use any assistance government bureaucrats might be able to provide to plug a \$1.9-million shortfall.

There are no real villains here, unless one wants to blame someone for the state's weak revenues, or federal lawmakers who rewrote legislation that expanded eligibility for this critical transportation program. Because of those federal rule changes, upwards of 70 communities in Michigan are slated to receive money that the MTA and two other regional bus systems have shared for five years.

Rather than Flint getting the accustomed \$1 million annually to provide rides to Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills, auto suppliers and other job sites in southeast Michigan, the amount was slashed to \$209,000. Meanwhile, state government says it no longer can afford the \$1 million it was kicking in as a match.

Despite the funding drop-off, Foy says the ride-to-work program will continue through this fiscal year. But that gives him only until Sept. 30 to find other funding. Some of this might come from any newly eligible communities that decline their share, but reallocating this money would require federal acquiescence. Foy will also seek out new grants.

At least, he should find bipartisan allies, with employees and employers in several counties benefiting from this MTA service. In fact, there is no constituency we can think of that would want this job assistance to end.

Michigan Report

January 23, 2006

WELFARE CASELOADS UP OVER HOLIDAYS

The number of families receiving cash assistance from the state increased in November and December, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 78,548 cases in November and 79,138 in December, up from 78,534 in October. The caseloads represented 212,740 people in November and 214,058 in December, from 212,813 in October.

The Food Assistance Program provided aid to 498,935 households in November and 502,981 households in December. Those levels were 497,814 cases in October.

Childcare cases also began to climb again in November with 64,700 cases that month and 64,720 cases in December from 62,958 cases in October.

Earned income cases dropped in December to 33 percent of those required to find work, down from 34 percent in November and October. But the percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit has held steady at about 13 percent since October.

GIVE-A-CHRISTMAS: Fund slows but holds hope for goal

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 22, 2006

ROYAL OAK — Holidays are over, but the need for help is still strong among local charities trying to help people in this state's struggling economy.

Give-A-Christmas Year Around fell well below its \$80,000 fund-raising goal this holiday season.

But the charity that assists at least nine local human service agencies will continue all year — hence its name — to help as many people as possible.

Give-A-Christmas shares its funds with Common Ground Sanctuary, the Judson Center, HAVEN, Troy People Concerned, the South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County, South Oakland YMCA and the Salvation Army. The charity had enough left over the last two years to add the YWCA in Clawson and Gateway Counseling in Madison Heights to the mix.

January 24, 2006

Traverse City Record Eagle Editorial

TC Boys and Girls Club first to fall to new reality

The issue:

Rising prices, bigger burdens

Our view:

The least among us will suffer most

The Traverse City Boys and Girls Club was first. But it may not be the last.

The combination of rising gasoline, natural gas, fuel oil, drug and health care prices, stagnant wages, increased housing costs and tapped-out charities is putting a squeeze on northern Michigan that will be felt for years to come.

It's a burden that, as always, falls most upon those least able to support it - the elderly, the disabled, single parents and children. Getting through this winter will be a big step.

Retirees on fixed incomes are facing \$300-a-month heating bills. People who earn \$8 to \$10 an hour pump most of a day's wages into their cars to get to work for another week. Co-pays and premiums for those lucky enough to have health care are creeping ever upward.

Nationally and in Michigan, many foundations and charities that support agencies like the Boys and Girls Club are running on empty. Requests for aid are way up, but donation revenues are falling. The state is broke.

When gasoline prices spiked to more than \$3.40 a gallon earlier this year, people said they would skimp here and there to make due.

But months and months of prices in the \$2.40-a-gallon range have sapped budgets. Making due is harder than ever. This winter's home heating bills could hit \$2,000 for some, and many can't afford it.

The Boys and Girls Club, which serves some 2,000 kids in three locations around Traverse City, has apparently been inching toward insolvency and is now in up to its neck. The club closed its doors last week and board members hope to reopen in two months.

That may be wishful thinking. The club is \$100,000 in debt, facing rising expenses and a projected \$50,000 drop in revenues from donations and grants.

It's a major crisis, particularly for the single parents and two- or three-job families that depend on the club as an after-school place for their kids. Finding an alternative is a colossal challenge.

There are no easy outs here. Charities and funding sources are stretched. Boys and Girls Club board members are going to try to mount a fundraising drive, but it won't be easy.

The safety net - if there ever was such a thing - is in shreds, and it's every family for itself. Our state and national economies have been turned on their heads. Oil and natural gas companies make record profits as families shiver and parents walk to work because they can't pay for gasoline.

Finding a new place for the kids to go after school is just another burden, and another reason to wish the Boys and Girls Club a speedy return to service.

Meals program asks for help

Director of service hopes communities it serves can help offset a \$20,000 deficit.

*Valerie Olander / The Detroit News
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The county Meals on Wheels program, which serves 13,000 meals to homebound seniors annually, ended 2005 in the red. Now, it's seeking contributions from Livingston County's 16 municipalities.

The service, operated as the Livingston Senior Nutrition Program, laid off its director and ended weekend delivery late last year. It still had a \$20,000 deficit.

To restore its meal service and operations it must come up with \$57,122. A much-needed kitchen rehabilitation at its Brighton hot meal center would add \$77,800 to its deficit, according to projections.

"We cut weekends, we cut sack meals. For the first time in 15 years we had to start a waiting list in September," said Margaret Davey, executive director of the food program contracted by the Area Agency on Aging 1B. Federal funding has been stagnant while the senior population grows and other costs rise. The county cut \$5,000 from the program funding this year, too.

Meanwhile, another hit is expected as the Legislature considers a 2 percent across-the-board cut on domestic programs this year.

Sandra Reminga, head of the six-county regional Area Agency on Aging, said she was waiting to find out how big of a hit that will be on the state and how it will trickle down to Meals on Wheels.

This is the first time Livingston communities have been asked to contribute to the food program.

In other counties, such as Oakland, local governments allocate money from community block grant funds or from the general fund. In some areas, such as Rochester, a senior citizen millage assists the meal program.

"What hurt the most is when we lost a lot of our volunteer drivers when gas prices went up," Davey said. The program reimburses for mileage now, she said.

Green Oak Township, which was asked for a \$13,762 contribution based on the number of seniors living there, delayed its decision last week until the new budget year starts April 1.

"We've lost \$167,000 in state shared revenue and on top of that, if you take all the unfunded mandates, it's well over a \$300,000 loss," said Township Supervisor Mark St. Charles.

Another nonprofit senior group approached the township two weeks earlier and was told the same thing.

The Brighton Senior Center is expecting a \$50,000 loss this year, said Nancy Hall, center director.

The senior center serves residents in Green Oak, Genoa, Hamburg and Brighton townships, as well as the city of Brighton.

The Brighton City Council agreed to contribute \$2,600 to the senior center this year and \$5,600 in its next budget.

However, not everyone agreed with using city coffers.

"I'm going to vote 'no.' It's not because I don't support the seniors, it's because we're going to get stuck here. Are we going to be asked to come bail other people out, too?" Councilman Jim Muzzin said.

The senior center is operated by the Brighton Area Schools Community Education Department, which began charging for expenses that had been offered as in-kind donations. Space in its Community Center, custodial help and telephone service will cost the seniors \$20,000 annually.

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Oakland County

Seniors, disabled can get free snow removal

Eligible senior citizens and people with disabilities will be able to turn to the Oakland County Sheriff's Office for help when snowfall this winter exceeds 3 inches. Supervised crews from the sheriff's Boot Camp will be sent out to help dig out residents. To register, residents should call the community service hot line at (248) 975-9700 and hit key No. 5 to leave a name and address